



BRUSSELS, 8 DECEMBER 2020

To: Heads of EU States

CC: Council President Michel, Commission President Von der Leyen, Parliament President Sassoli, Commission First executive Vice-President Timmermans

Upping EU's 2030 GHG emissions reduction target to - 65% to respond to the twin COVID-19 pandemic and climate crises

Honourable Member of the European Council,

This week at the European Council, you will be discussing and agreeing the new 2030 Greenhouse gas emissions reduction target for the EU.

Your deliberations are taking place on the eve of 5th anniversary of the landmark Paris Agreement, where you have committed to limiting global warming to well below 2°C and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C. Since 2015 the urgency to act on global heating has become ever more clear.

As the leading European not-for-profit organisation addressing how the natural and built environments affect health in the European Union (EU), **the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) calls on you to step up your commitment for a healthy planet for healthy people with upping the EU's GHG emissions reduction target to at least -65%.**

New evidence underlines the huge health benefits and opportunities for disease prevention from decisive climate and recovery action. Gains in health and reduced healthcare costs would also offset a part of the investment cost of climate mitigation, though the full extent remains unclear.

The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change¹ has concluded that no country – whether rich or poor – is left untouched by the health impacts of climate change.

Now in its 5th year, the Lancet's annual analysis tracks progress across 43 indicators, demonstrating what climate action – and inaction – means for human health:

- **Europe is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of extreme heat.** With its ageing city-dominated population, Europe scores highest on the report's heat vulnerability index, which combines heatwave exposure with data on population susceptibility and the ability of health systems to cope. In 2018 alone, the European region saw more than a third of heat-related mortality in the elderly with 104,000 out of 296,000 deaths globally.
- **These shocks and impacts can be mitigated to achieve health and economic benefits.** The academics and clinicians behind the new report underline that if urgent action to tackle climate change and implement plans to deliver commitments of limiting global temperature increases to well below 2°C is

¹ The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change is a unique multidisciplinary collaboration between 120 experts from more than 35 institutions (including the World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank, University College London, and Tsinghua University) dedicated to monitoring the evolving health profile of climate change, and providing an independent assessment of the delivery of commitments made by governments worldwide under the Paris Agreement. www.lancetcountdown.org

taken, **these actions could also reduce the risk of future pandemics** because the drivers of climate change can also drive zoonotic pandemic risk (the risk of pandemics caused by infectious diseases that jump from non-human animals to humans).

- **The window of opportunity is narrow**, and if COVID-19 policies are not fully aligned with climate ambitions, Europe will be unable to meet its emissions reduction commitments, impacting health and economies for decades to come.

COVID-19 has exposed the vulnerability of Europeans especially when it comes to their health and the dependence of economic stability on public health. Meanwhile, the production and burning of fossil fuels (oil, coal, gas) results in the release of hazardous air pollution and drives climate change with disastrous consequences all over the world. Air pollution and climate change are interlinked and have manifold impacts on human health, in the short and long term.

The European Commission's [Impact Assessment](#) to the recently proposed EU Climate Law shows that significant reductions in emissions of SO₂, NO_x and PM_{2.5} will follow from increasing the EU's GHG reduction target for 2030 from the current 40% to 55%. Even bigger air pollutant cuts would follow if the EU's GHG reduction target would be strengthened in line with what is needed for the Paris Agreement, namely at least -65%, which is what health groups call for.

HEAL would like to underline ambitious climate action not only includes upping the EU's 2030 target to at least -65%, but also actions to:

1. **End any support for any [fossil fuel](#) by 2025**
2. **Ensure a [just transition](#)**
3. **Accelerate the path to zero pollution to [prevent disease](#)**

HEAL counts on your leadership this week to unlock the best possible future for all, embarking on the journey towards a healthy planet for healthy people.

Yours sincerely,



Genon K. Jensen
Executive Director
Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

Annexes: [Lancet Countdown 2020 – Global report](#) [Lancet Countdown 2020 – EU policy brief](#)

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is the leading not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects human health in the European Union (EU) and beyond. HEAL works to shape laws and policies that promote planetary and human health and protect those most affected by pollution, and raise awareness on the benefits of environmental action for health.

HEAL's over 90 member organisations include international, European, national and local groups of health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts representing over 200 million people across the 53 countries of the WHO European Region.

As an alliance, HEAL brings independent and expert evidence from the health community to EU and global decision-making processes to inspire disease prevention and to promote a toxic-free, low-carbon, fair and healthy future.

HEAL's EU Transparency Register Number: 00723343929-96